

# AVOIDING HYPOTHERMIA



## PREPARE IN ADVANCE

1. **CHOOSE THE RIGHT CLOTHES:** choose a fabric that keeps you the driest. Wetness conducts heat away from the body 25 times faster than dryness, AND when clothes get wet, they lose about 90% of their insulating value. Don't wear cotton...it absorbs moisture. Choose wool, or even better, synthetic fibers like polyester. Some of the newer fabrics actually wick moisture away from your skin, keeping you even drier and warmer. In addition, layer your clothing to create dead air space that acts as an insulator, keeping the cold out and your body heat in. Wear a warm head covering. Most body heat is actually lost through the head.
2. **PACK ALONG FOOD AND BEVERAGES:** dehydration contributes to hypothermia, so drink plenty of non-alcoholic liquids. Drinking alcohol is dangerous; you'll have a false sense of warmth, because it makes the skin feel warm. However, the alcohol actually allows heat to escape and lowers your internal temperature. Avoid coffee, tea and tobacco as well as alcohol, because they all cause your body to lose heat. Eat high energy foods like nuts, fruits, and energy bars so your body has calories left over to use to keep you warm.

## RESPECT THE WEATHER

1. **BEWARE OF THE WIND:** it multiplies the problems of staying dry. A slight breeze carries heat away from bare skin much faster than still air. Wind drives cold air under and through clothing. Wind refrigerates wet clothes by evaporating moisture from the surface.
2. **UNDERSTANDING COLD:** most hypothermia cases develop in air temperatures between 30 and 50 degrees. Most outdoor enthusiast simply can't believe such temperatures can be dangerous. They fatally underestimate the danger of being wet at such temperatures. Fifty degree **water** is unbearably cold. The cold that kills is **cold water** running down your neck and legs, and **cold water** removing body heat from the surface of your clothes.

## KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

1. Uncontrollable fits of shivering
2. Vague, slow, slurred speech
3. Memory lapses or incoherence
4. Immobile, fumbling hands
5. Frequent stumbling
6. Drowsiness (to sleep is to die)
7. Apparent exhaustion, inability to get up after a rest



**TREAT THE CONDITION :** The victim may deny he/she is in trouble. Believe the symptoms, not the person. Even mild symptoms demand immediate treatment.

1. Terminate exposure: be smart enough to give up making your limit, hiking to the peak or whatever you had in mind. Return home, to camp or to your vehicle. Get out of the wind and rain.
2. Get the victim out of any wet clothes
3. If only mildly impaired, give victim small amounts of warm non-alcoholic drinks and high-energy food, get him/her into dry clothes and warm dry sleeping bag or bed. Place well-wrapped warm (not hot) rocks, canteens, hot water bottles or heating pads anywhere the main arteries are close to the surface of the skin. This will hasten recovery.
4. If victim is semi-conscious or worse, try to keep him/her awake. Don't give hot liquids by mouth. Leave him/her stripped and in a sleeping bag with another person (or two), who are also stripped. Skin-to-skin contact is very effective treatment.
5. Transport to the closest hospital for monitoring without delay.